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# Honest voice crying in gov't wilderness

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WASHINGTON—Former Sen. John Tower voiced a widespread perception last week when he declared the Iran-Contra arms scandal "is really a story of people whose performance was perhaps somewhat short of heroic."

But there is one shining light in the dim record of the scandal. His name is John McMahon—the lone hero in the story.

As deputy director of the CIA he was the only voice in the crowd that insisted the law be followed in the administration's covert dealings with Iran, and it was pressure from McMahon that forced the administration to take steps to make the process legal.

He also argued forcefully against the policy of swapping arms for hostages and, according to congressional sources, finally resigned in protest from his job in mid-1986 when his counsel was ignored.

McMahon's actions stand in sharp contrast to those of his successor, Robert Gates, who as deputy CIA director was a willing participant in the arms sales policies and was one of the first administration officials to receive evidence that cash from the arms sales might have been illegally siphoned to help the Contras in Nicaragua.

## Whistle blower

Gates was sharply criticized by members of the Senate Intelligence Committee for failing to pursue that information vigorously and for being too willing to back the harebrained covert schemes hatched in the National Security Council.

McMahon, 57, joined the CIA fresh out of Holy Cross College in Worcester, Mass., in 1951, and was named deputy director in 1982. He blew the whistle on the arms sales policy when he discovered on Dec. 7, 1985, that the CIA was involved in helping ship 18 Hawk anti-aircraft missile batteries to Iran.

McMahon had authorized CIA participation in the shipment that had taken place the previous month because White House officials lied to him by saying the shipment involved "oil drilling parts."

When he learned the truth, McMahon reportedly "went through the overhead (roof) pointing out that there was no way we could become involved in any implementation of this mission without a 'finding.'"

A "finding" is the legally required certification that the President must sign in order to begin a covert operation.

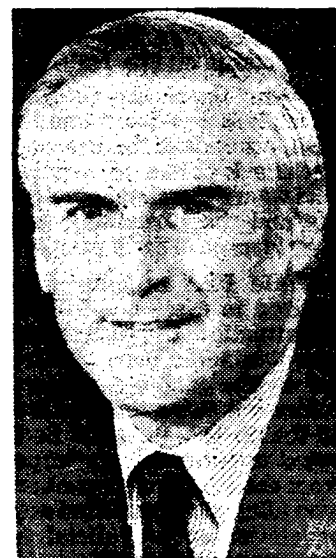
At a meeting the same day in the Oval Office, he told those gathered, including President Reagan: "What the hell are we doing here? Arms are being sent. Where is the formal authority? You know, what are we doing here? Is this going to be policy?"

He also questioned the basic premise of the arms sale policy, asserting that "we have no knowledge of moderates in Iran, that most of the moderates had been slaughtered when (Ayatollah) Khomeini took over." He argued that any weapons sold to Iran "would end up in the front, and that would be to the detriment of the Iran-Iraq balance."

After heated debate, McMahon lost. Reagan signed a "finding," but ordered that it be kept secret from Congress and key administration opponents of the arms sales, such as Secretary of State Shultz, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger—and McMahon.

However, McMahon found out about the finding a week after it was signed on Jan. 17. He eventually resigned his post in March 1986, ending a 34-year career with the CIA, as gleeful conservatives claimed their pressure had forced out an "obstructionist" from the agency brass.

In fact, according to a Senate source, McMahon left in protest of a policy he knew was doomed to fail.



**John McMahon**